

T H E

Christian History;

Containing Accounts of the Propagation and Revival
of Religion in *England* *Scotland* and *America*.

To be publish'd Weekly.

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Mr. DANFORTH'S Account continued.

BUT who is there left among you that saw these Churches in their *first Glory*? And how do you see them now?

Are they not in your Eyes in Comparison thereof as *nothing*? Is not the Temper, Complection & Countenance, of the Churches strangely altered? Doth not a careles, remiss, flat, dry, cold, dead Frame of Spirit grow upon us secretly, strongly, prodigiously? They that have Ordinances are as though they had none; they that hear the Word as though they heard it not; and they that pray as tho' they prayed not; and they that receive the Sacraments as tho' they received them not; and they that are exercised in the holy Things, using them by the by as Matters of Custom and Ceremony. Pride, Contention, Worldliness, Covetousness, Luxury, Drunkenness and Uncleanness break in like a Flood upon us; and good Men grow cold in their Love to God, and one another.

4. The Reverend & famous Dr. INCREASE MATHER in a Treatise intitled *Pray for the rising Generation*, Printed in 1678, writes, as follows--

Prayer is needful on this Account, in that CONVERSIONS are become *rare* in this Age of the World. They that have their Thoughts exercised in discerning Things of this Nature, have had sad Apprehensions with Reference unto this Matter; That the WORK of CONVERSION hath been at a great Stand in the World. In the last Age, in the Days of our Fathers, in other Parts of the World, *see a Sermon*

preached but some evidently converted, and sometimes Hundreds in a Sermon. Which of us can say we have seen the like? Clear, sound CONVERSIONS are not frequent in some Congregations. The Body of the rising Generation is a poor, perishing, UNCONVERTED, and (except the Lord pour down his Spirit) an undone Generation. Many that are Profane, Drunkards, Swearers, Lascivious, Scoffers at the Power of Godliness, Despisers of those that are good, Disobedient. Others that are only civil, and outwardly conformed to good Order, by Reason of their Education, but never knew what the NEW BIRTH means.'

5. The venerable Mr. SAMUEL TORREY, Pastor of the Church at Weymouth, in his Sermon intitled, *A Plea for the Life of dying Religion*, from Deut. xxxii. 47. Because it is your Life; Preached before the General Court of the MASSACHUSETTS Colony on May 16. 1683, being the Day of their Election, says:

That there hath been a vital Decay, a Decay upon the very Vitals of Religion, by a deep Declension in the Life, & Power of it; that there is already a great Death upon Religion, little more left than a Name to live; that the Things which remain, are ready to die; and that we are in great Danger of dying together with it: This is one of the most awakening, and humbling Considerations of our present State and Condition. Oh! the many deadly Symptoms, Symptoms of Death, that are upon our Religion! Consider we then how much it is dying respecting the very Being of it, by the general Failure of the WORK of CONVERSION; whereby only it is that Religion is propagated, continued, and upheld in Being among any People. As CONVERTING-WORK doth cease, so Religion doth die away; though more insensibly, yet most irrecoverably. How much Religion is dying in the very Hearts of sincere Christians, by their Declensions in Grace, Holiness, and the Power of Godliness! How much it is dying, respecting the visible Profession, and Practice of it: partly by the Formality of Churches; but more by the Hypocrisy, and Apostasy of formal, hypocritical Professors! How much it is dying under the prevailing Power of those Sins and Evils, which are utterly inconsistent with, and destructive of the Life of it! Those Sins continuing, and prevailing, Religion cannot live, it must needs die. Such as are the deep, and general degeneracy of the Generations; unprofitable

unprofitableness under all Means of Grace, Unbelief, and Disobedience to the Gospel ; Formality, Hypocrisy, and spiritual Idolatry in the Worship of God ; Prophanations, and Pollutions of the House of God ; slighting and neglect of holy Things, Interests, and Injoyments thereof ; Worldliness, Prophaneness, Sensuality. Hence how is Religion dying in *Churches* ! Churches, which are constituted on Purpose for the Propagation, and Preservation of the Life of Religion ; that live, and have their Being, only by the Life of Religion, how little is there of the Life of Religion left in them ! and how are Churches themselves *languishing* and dying together with Religion ! How is Religion dying in *Families* ! through the Neglect of the religious Service and Worship of God, and of the religious Education of Children and Youth in Families. Truly, here, and hereby Religion first received it's Death's Wound. Hence Religion is dying in all other Societies, amog all Orders & Degrees of Men, in all Ways of Converse, both Civil and Ecclesiastical. O there is little or nothing of the Life of Religion to be seen, or appearing either in the Frame, or Way, Hearts, or Lives of the generality of the Professors of it. And that which remains thereof, *ready to die* !

6. The aforesaid Dr. INCREASE MATHER in his PREFACE to Mr. Torrey's said *Election Sermon*, then also wrote as follows—

It hath often been affirmed, and truly, that the *distinguishing Character* whereby NEW ENGLAND is differenced from other *Out-goings* of the *English Nation*, is, in that the *great Motive inducing the first Planters to remove into a howling Wilderness, was the Interest of RELIGION*. And whilst Men continued faithful to that blessed Design, it was well with them. They that fought first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousnes, had other Things added unto them. Nor did any Weapons formed against us in those Days prosper. The Lord hath caused us to see that Religion is *our Life*. That this Interest, without which, we ourselves cannot live, hath been *for many Years languishing* and dying, is the *Observation* of all Men, that have their Hearts exercised in discerning Things of this Nature. The Complaint is, that NEW ENGLAND is *not to be found in NEW ENGLAND* ; but we are become like the rest of the Nations, being grown into the same Conformity to the World, with

other Plantations, whose Interest and Profession never was
 as our's hath been. There is a woful Decay as to *Externals*,
 and the Form of Religion amongst the Professors of it.
 Hearing the Word as to the publick Dispensation thereof,
 Prayer with Fasting, and other religious Exercises, (which
 reach no further than the Form of Godliness) are not so
 frequent as in former Days : and that is a most certain Sign,
 that the *Power of Godliness* is much more in a *bleeding* and
dying State.

7. The Reverend and Renowned Mr. SAMUEL WILLARD,
 Pastor of the *South Church* in *Boston*, and Vice President of *Harvard College* ; in his Sermon intitled, *The Perils of the Times Displayed* ; Printed in 1700.

That there is a *Form of Godliness* among us is manifest.
 But the great Inquiry is, whether there be not too much
 of a general *denying of the Power of it* ? Whence else is
 it, that there be such Things as these that follow to be ob-
 served ? That there is such a Prevalency of so many *Immo-
 ralities* among *Professors*. That there is so little Success of
 the *Gospel*. How few thorough *Conversions* are to be ob-
 served ? How scarce and seldom ? Men go from *Ordi-
 nance* to *Ordinance*, and from *Year* to *Year*, and it may
 be a little awakned and affected, but how few are
effectually turned from *Sin* to *God*. It is to be hoped that
 there are more than we know of : This *Work of God* is
 secret : however this is a certain *Observation* which may
 be safely made, that *where* there is *no OUTWARD CON-
 VERSION*, *Charity hath no Ground to proceed on to believe*
that there is an INWARD one ; for were the *Heart* savingly
 changed, that would influence the *Life* ; yea, were Men
 pricked to the *Heart* under the *Ordinances*, they would
 cry out for *Help and Direction*, and we should hear of them.
 And how little is there to be discerned of a *growing Grace* in
 them that pretend to have experienced a *WORK OF CON-
 VERSION* ? Whence is it that so many grow weary of
 Christ's *Yoke*, that there is so much *Contempt* cast on the
Gospel Ministry ? Whence the *loose Conversation* of *Pro-
 fessors* ; the grievous *neglect* of *Family-Worship* ; the woful
Ignorance that prevails among us ; the little *Savour* of *God-
 liness* in the *private Conversation* of *Christians* ? The *Heart*
 that is full of *God* will be like a *Vessel* that is *filled with new
 Wine*, which must have *vent*. *David* saith, *I am a Compa-*

nion

‘ nion of them that fear thee ; and that all his Delight is
‘ in These ; and why so ? because they are suitable for
‘ that Communication which his Heart breathes after.
‘ And we are told that *they that feared God spake often*
‘ *one to another* : And what do we think they discoursed about ?
‘ An Heart that is filled with Grace, is in it’s Element when
‘ the Man is discoursing about the Kingdom and the Affairs
‘ of that. When therefore Professors either shun the Com-
‘ pany of the godly, and seek Intimacy with vain Persons ; or
‘ when they come together, spend their Time in vain foolish
‘ Discourses, or at best about the Affairs of this World, and
‘ not one warming Word about the Concerns of their Souls
‘ and Eternity, it saith there wants the Power of GODLI-
‘ NESS. If their Treasure were in Heaven, their Hearts wou’d
‘ be there : and if so, they would delight to be talking of their own
‘ Country : Whereas it is too notorious that such Conferences
‘ are very rare : and let a serious Christian begin them, and
‘ he shall find the most to be silent about them : but if we divert
‘ to worldly Affairs, they are full of Matter. If godly Com-
‘ munication be burdensome, it plainly saith our ~~SHEW~~ of
‘ Goodness is but a Shew, and hath no Life in it. Whence
‘ the bad Symptoms that are on the rising Generation. It
‘ hath been a frequent Observation ; that if one Generation
‘ begins to decline, the next that follows usually grows worse,
‘ and so on, till God pours out his Spirit again upon them. The
‘ Decays which we do already languish under are sad : and what
‘ Tokens are on our Children, that it is like to be better
‘ hereafter ? God be thanked that there are so many among
‘ them that promise well : But alas, how doth Vanity, and
‘ a fondness after new Things abound among them ? --- How
‘ do young Professors grow weary of the strict Profession
‘ of their Fathers, and become strong Disputants for those
‘ Things which their Progenitors forsook a pleasant Land for
‘ the Avoidance of !

8. Dr. Increase Mather, in his Book intitled, *The Glory departing from NEW-ENGLAND* : Printed in 1702, wrote as follows :

‘ Let the Life and Power of Godliness be revived --- That
‘ has been the singular Glory of NEW-ENGLAND. The
‘ Generality of the first Planters were Men eminent for God-
‘ lines. We are the posterity of the good old Puritan Non-
‘ conformists in ENGLAND, who where a strict and holy
‘ into

People. Such were our Fathers who followed the Lord into this Wilderness. *O NEW-ENGLAND ! NEW-ENGLAND !* look to it that the Glory be not removed from thee ! For it begins to go ! O tremble : for it is going, it is gradually departing ! Altho' there is that of divine Glory still remaining which we ought to be very thankful for ; nevertheless much of it is gone. You that are aged Persons and can remember what NEW-ENGLAND was *fifty Years ago*, that saw these Churches in their first Glory ; is there not a sad Decay and Diminution of that Glory ! How is the Gold become dim ! the most fine Gold changed ! Yea, how are the Golden Candlesticks changed in NEW-ENGLAND ! Alas ! what a Change is there in that which hath been our Glory ! Time was when these Churches were beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an Army with Banners. What a glorious Presence of Christ was there in all his Ordinances. Many were converted, and willingly declared what God had done for their Souls : and there were added to the Churches daily such as should be saved. But are not found *Conversions* become rare in this Day and in many Congregations ? Look into *Pulpits*, and see if there is such a Glory there as once there was : NEW-ENGLAND has had Teachers eminent for Learning, and no less eminent for Holiness, and all ministerial Accomplishmens. When will *Boston* see a *COTTON* and a *NORTON* again ? When will NEW-ENGLAND see a *HOOKER*, a *SHEPARD*, a *MITCHELL*, not to mention others. No little Part of the Glory was laid in the Dust when these eminent Servants of Christ were laid in their Graves. Look into our *Civil State* ; does Christ reign there as once he did ? How many Churches, how many Towns are there in *New-England* that we may sigh over them and say,-- The Glory is gone ! How many are there among us, whose Fathers in coming into this Wilderness designed nothing but Religion, but they are for another Interest !

There is sad Cause to fear that greater Departures of the Glory are hastning upon us. For 1st. Those Sins which have provoked the Lord to remove his Glory, are not reformed, nor like to be : Our Iniquities testify against us, and our Backslidings are many. That there is a general Defection in *New-England* from primitive Purity and Piety in many Respects, is so plain it cannot be denied.

denied. 2dly, There are Ministers who are not like their Predecessors, nor principled not spirited as they were. 3dly, The Providence of God is threatening to pull down the Wall which has been a Defence to these Churches. 4thly, That which some have thought was the special Design of Providence in bringing choice People into this Part of the World seems to be now over. It has been by wise and good Men conjectured that the Lord's more peculiar Design was that the World might see a Specimen of what shall be over all the Earth in the glorious Times expected.

In those Days what Manner of Persons will there be in Power as to civil Government? And what kind of Laws shall there be established? A Prophet hath told us Isai. 60. 17. *I will make thy Officers Peace, and thy Exactors Righteousness.* And in those Days how will Church Members be qualified? That we see in the same Prophet, Ver. 21. *Thy People shall be all righteous.* It was very much thus in New-England many Years ago, but neither our civil or ecclesiastical State is ever like to be what once it was.

9. Dr. Increase Mather in a Preface to a Course of Sermons on *Early Piety* by some Ministers of Boston, Printed 1721, writes,--

I am now in the eighty third Year of my Age: and having had an Opportunity to converse with the first Planners of this Country, and having been for sixty five Years a Preacher of the Gospel; I cannot but be in the Disposition of those ancient Men who had seen the Foundation of the first House, and wept with a loud Voice to see what a Change the Work of the Temple had upon it. I wish it were no other than the Weakness of Horace's old Man, the *Laudator Temporis Acti*, when I complain there is a grievous Decay of Piety in the Land, and a leaving the first Love, and that the *Beauties of Holiness*, are not to be seen as once they were; a fruitful Christian grown too rare a Spectacle; yea too many are given to Change, and leave that Order of the Gospel, to set up and uphold which was the very Design of these Colonies; and the very Interest of New-England seems to be changed from a religious to a worldly one. Oh! that my Head were Waters, and mine Eyes a Fountain of Tears.

And in a Sermon in the aforemention'd Book, on *Early Piety*, he further writes,

The

‘ The Children of New-England are or once were for the most Part the Children of godly Men. What did our Fathers come into this Wilderness for ? Not to gain Estates, as Men do now, but for Religion, and that they might leave their Children in a hopeful Way of being truly religious. There was a famous Man that preached before one of the greatest Assemblies that ever was preached unto seventy Years ago ; and he told them, *I have lived in a Country seven Years, and all that Time I never heard one profane Oath, and all that Time I never did see a Man drunk in that Land.* Where was that Country ? It was *New-England* ! But ah degenerate *New-England*, what art thou come to at this Day ? How are those Sins become common in thee, that once were not so much as heard of in this Land.’

We shall conclude this Ild *General Head* with some remarkable Passages in a Sermon of the late Reverend & Learned Dr. *Cotton Mather*, of blessed Memory, Preached at the publick Lecture in *Boston*, and printed in 1706, Intitled, *The Good old Way* ; in the following Words ;

‘ It is confessed by all, who know any Thing of the Matter ; and, Oh ! Why not with *Rivers of Tears* bewailed ! That there is a general, and an horrible *Decay of Christianity*, among the Professors of it. The glorious and heavenly Religion of our precious *CHRIST*, generally appears with quite another Face, in the Lives of *Christians* at this Day, than what it had in the Lives of the *Saints*, into whose Hands the *Matchless Gift of God*, was first of all delivered. The *modern Christianity*, 'tis too generally, but a very *Spectre*, Scarce a *Shadow* of the *Ancient* ! *Ab ! sinful Nation. Ab, Children that are Corrupters* ; What have your Hands done, to defile, and to deface, a *Jewel*, which restored unto its Native Lustre, would outshine the *Sun* in the Firmament ! So notorious is this *Decay of Christianity*, that whole Books are ever now and then written to inquire into it : *What is the Cause, that the former Days were better than these ? And it were well, if always they did wisely inquire concerning it.*

(To be continued.)

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